


Hanuman presents the Travel Professionals Guide to Angkor

A silhouette of the Angkor Wat temple complex is visible against a bright, hazy sky at sunset or sunrise. The temple's iconic towers are reflected in a body of water in the foreground, which is covered with lily pads. The overall scene is peaceful and atmospheric.

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Dear Friends and Partners,

A very warm welcome to Hanuman's Angkor travel planner, the perfect companion to planning a journey to the majestic temples of Angkor, the heart and soul of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

We look forward to introducing you to the incredible wealth of temples that are dotted throughout the jungle around Siem Reap. Hanuman has a well-established reputation as one of the most innovative travel operators in the region and we have thought long and hard about the best way to approach Angkor to ensure your clients get the most out of their visit of a lifetime. Planning is an essential part of any visit to ensure they avoid the crowds for a more solitary and spiritual experience. We will be happy to help you plan the visit to get the most out of their time at this eighth wonder of the world. Consult our staff today about arranging a tailored itinerary.

Angkor is heaven on earth, the home of the Gods cast in stone. Let Hanuman ensure a heavenly experience for your clients while exploring these monuments and help your guests avoid the crowds from hell that sometimes blight the visitor experience at certain times of day.

Kulikar Sotho
Executive Director
Hanuman
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Top Ten Angkor Experiences

- Witness the sunrise at the mother of all temples, **Angkor Wat**, the world's largest religious building
- Experience the serenity and splendour of the **Bayon**, with its eerie and enigmatic faces
- Explore the mysterious ruin of **Ta Prohm**, where nature has triumphed over man
- Be mesmerised by the delicate carvings adorning **Banteay Srei**, the most exquisite at Angkor
- Hike through the jungle to find the River of a Thousand Lingas at **Kbal Spean**
- Wander the lengthy corridors of **Preah Khan**, the original fusion temple uniting Buddhism and Hinduism
- Clamber through the titanic of temples, **Beng Mealea**, slowly suffocating under dense foliage
- Journey to the usurper capital of **Koh Ker**, abandoned to the jungle for 1000 years or more
- Tackle a Temple Safari to the king of the mountain temples, **Preah Vihear**, perched on a dramatic cliff
- Discover a world of water at the floating villages of the Tonle Sap, including **Kompong Khleang**



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Planning a Visit to the Temples of Angkor

Much of Cambodia may remain an off-the-beaten-path adventure destination, but the temples of Angkor are well and truly on the visitor trail through Southeast Asia. Tourist numbers are rising by the year, making those serene and spiritual moments within the confines of empty temples a little harder to come across, but with a little planning it is still possible to escape the crowds. Here at Hanuman, we have been planning Angkor itineraries for the best part of two decades and are happy to share our knowledge and experience with you to ensure you have a once in a lifetime encounter with these incredible temples. The art of planning plays a big part in getting the most out of your visit and we have created our programme of visits to take in the leading temples at less busy times of day and to include some of the lesser-known gems that fewer visitors see. Our tour guides are an exceptional group who have spent years unravelling the mysteries of Angkor. They are full of initiative and happy to adjust your programme to suit your stamina and accommodate any individual interests you may have.

One important thing to keep in mind, particularly when it comes to sunrise and sunset, is that places are popular for a reason, and it is worth following the crowds once in a while. The most popular place for sunrise is Angkor Wat. Most tour groups head back to town for breakfast, so we suggest sticking around and exploring the temple while it's cool and quiet. The Bayon sees far fewer visitors than Angkor Wat in the early hours, as the light reveals the looming faces. Sra Srang is usually quiet, and a good sunrise here can be spectacular thanks to reflections in the water. Phnom Bakheng is an attractive option, because the sun comes up behind Angkor Wat and you are far from the madding crowds who gather here at sunset. Ta Prohm is an alternative, with no sight of sunrise, but a mysterious and magical atmosphere.

The definitive sunset spot is the hilltop temple of Phnom Bakheng, but this is a bit of a circus these days, with thousands of tourists clamouring for a view. Better to check it out for sunrise or early morning and miss the crowds. Staying within the confines of Angkor Wat for sunset is a rewarding option, as it can be pretty peaceful when most tourists head off to Phnom Bakheng around 4.30pm or so. Pre Rup is popular with some for an



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authentic rural sunset over the surrounding rice-fields, but this is starting to get busier (although nothing like the circus at Bakheng). Better is the hilltop temple of Phnom Krom, which offers commanding views across the Tonle Sap lake, but involves a long drive back to town in the dark. The Western Baray takes the sunset in from the eastern end, across its vast waters, and is generally a quiet option.

When it comes to the most popular temples, the middle of the day is consistently the quietest time, as the large groups head back to town for lunch, but it's also the hottest. This makes it tough going around relatively open temples such as Banteay Srei and the Bayon, but fine at well-covered temples such as Ta Prohm, Preah Khan and Beng Mealea, or even the bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat. At most other temples, it's just a case of pot luck. If you pull up outside and see a car park full of tour buses, discuss the itinerary with your guide and consider moving on to somewhere quieter. The wonderful thing about Angkor is that there is always another temple to explore, with literally hundreds of temples scattered throughout the jungle.

There are several schools of thought when it comes to the order in which to view the temples. Some people like to cram as much as possible into the first couple of days before relaxing and returning to their favourite spots at a slower pace. A popular alternative is the steady build-up where visitors take in some of the smaller sites first before continuing to the most impressive temples later in the itinerary. This is a smart option, as the smaller sites are striking in their own right, but less so if you have already visited the big hitters like Angkor Wat and the Bayon. Another option is the chronological or thematic approach, which sees visitors group temples by period or by reigning king. This is a good way for history or archaeological buffs to get to grips with the evolution of architecture during the Khmer empire. One of the most important things about planning your itinerary around Angkor is leaving some free time to enjoy the facilities at our hotel and explore the streets of Siem Reap. Angkor is a place to be savoured, not rushed, and HanumanAlaya is the perfect base to plan your adventures.



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Transport around Angkor

An important element of a visit to Angkor is choosing the most suitable form of transport to explore the temples. There are many options, ranging from the environmentally-friendly options of cycling and walking, to the motorised alternatives of *remorque-moto* (tuk-tuk), car and 4WD. Please see the attached tariff sheet for a list of transport options to different temples around the Angkor complex if you plan on visiting alone without a guide. For the more remote temples such as Beng Mealea or Kbal Spean, prices are higher due to extra fuel costs. For the ultimate Angkor experience, try a pick and mix approach, with a *remorque-moto* or car to cover the remote sites, a bicycle to experience the central temples, and an exploration on foot for a spot of peace and serenity.

Bicycle

A great way to get around the temples, bicycles are environmentally friendly and are used by most locals living around the area. There are few hills and the roads are good, so there's no need for much cycling experience. Moving about at a slower speed, you soon find that you take in more than from out of a car window or on the back of a speeding *moto*. HanumanAlaya has Trek 4400 mountain bikes for rent, which are well-maintained and a much smoother ride than the Chinese bicycles around town. These are available for hire at US\$10 per day.

Car

Cars are a popular choice for exploring the temples. The obvious advantage is protection from the elements, be it rain or shine. The downside is that visitors are a little more isolated from the sights, sounds and smells as they travel between temples. HanumanAlaya can arrange Toyota Camry saloons to travel between the temples and smarter VIP cars on request. All minibus tariffs include chilled drinking water and cool towel.



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4WD

A 4WD isn't necessary for the vast majority of Angkor's temples. However, people planning adventures further afield such as a Temple Safari to the remote temples in Preah Vihear Province will need to arrange a 4WD. All minibus tariffs include chilled drinking water and cool towel.

Elephant

Travelling by elephant was the traditional way to see the temples way back in the early days of tourism at Angkor. It is once again possible to take an elephant ride between the south gate of Angkor Thom and the Bayon in the morning, or up to the summit of Phnom Bakheng for sunset. A half-day mahout course was recently introduced and includes learning some elephant commands, a ride around Angkor Thom and a chance to bathe the elephant.

Helicopter

For those seeking a different perspective on the temples, there are tourist flights around Angkor Wat and the temples outside Angkor Thom. Hanuman offers helicopter charters to remote temples such as Prasat Preah Vihear and Preah Khan, which is a great way to see these forgotten monuments in the jungle without the discomfort of long journeys on bumpy roads.

Hot-Air Balloon

For a bird's eye view of Angkor Wat, try the Angkor Balloon, which is on a fixed line and rises 200m above the landscape.



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Minibus

Hanuman can arrange minibuses for larger families or small groups to explore the temples in comfort. All minibus tariffs include chilled drinking water and cool towel.

Motorcycle

It is not possible for foreign guests to rent motorcycles in Siem Reap, but for the adventurous at heart, we can help arrange an English-speaking moto driver for the day to whisk you around the temples. When travelling around Siem Reap by day or night, it is best to negotiate a fare before setting off. Expect to pay around 2000r for short rides and US\$1 for longer rides, such as from HanumanAlaya to the Old Market.

Remorque-moto

A motorcycle with a hooded carriage in tow, these are often known as *tuk tuks*. They are a popular, even romantic way to get around Angkor and offer some protection from the rain. However, they are not really suitable for longer rides to destinations such as Banteay Srei. HanumanAlaya can arrange reliable remorque drivers for a tour of the temples. When travelling around Siem Reap by day or night, it is best to negotiate a fare before departing. Expect to pay around US\$1 for short rides and US\$2 to US\$3 for longer rides, such as from HanumanAlaya to the Old Market. Prices rise with numbers, so expect to pay more for three or more.



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Suggested Itineraries around Angkor

One Day at Angkor

Angkor Wat in the morning, Ta Prohm at lunchtime and Angkor Thom in the afternoon.

Two Days at Angkor

- 1, Ta Prohm at dawn then Banteay Srei. Preah Khan, Neak Poan and sunset at Preah Rup.
- 2, Angkor Wat in the morning and Angkor Thom in the afternoon.

Three Days at Angkor

- 1, Roluos group in the morning. Preah Khan, Neak Poan and sunset at Preah Rup.
- 2, Ta Prohm at dawn then Banteay Srei and Banteay Samre. Angkor Thom in the afternoon
- 3, Angkor Wat in the morning. Floating village on the Tonle Sap in the afternoon.

Four Days at Angkor

- 1, Roluos group in the morning. Preah Khan, Neak Poan and sunset at Preah Rup.
- 2, Kbal Spean in the morning. Beng Mealea in the afternoon
- 3, Ta Prohm at dawn then Banteay Srei and Banteay Samre. Angkor Thom in the afternoon
- 4, Angkor Wat in the morning. Floating village on the Tonle Sap in the afternoon.

Five Days at Angkor

- 1, Roluos group in the morning. Preah Khan, Neak Poan and sunset at Preah Rup.
- 2, Ta Prohm, Ta Keo, Banteay Kdei, Sra Srang. Floating village on the Tonle Sap in the afternoon.
- 3, Kbal Spean in the morning. Beng Mealea in the afternoon



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4, Free morning to relax in Siem Reap. Angkor Thom in the afternoon

5, Angkor Wat in the morning. Banteay Srei and Banteay Samre.

Six Days at Angkor

1, Roluos group in the morning. Preah Khan, Neak Poan and sunset at Preah Rup.

2, Ta Prohm, Ta Keo, Banteay Kdei, Sra Srang. Free afternoon to relax.

3, Kbal Spean and Banteay Srei. Floating village on the Tonle Sap in the afternoon.

4, Beng Mealea and Koh Ker adventure trip.

5, Free morning to relax in Siem Reap. Angkor Thom in the afternoon

6, Angkor Wat in the morning. Artisans d'Angkor and Western Baray in the afternoon.

Seven Days at Angkor

1, Roluos group in the morning. Preah Khan, Neak Poan and sunset at Preah Rup.

2, Ta Prohm, Ta Keo, Banteay Kdei, Sra Srang. Free afternoon to relax.

3, Kbal Spean and Banteay Srei. Historic pagodas of Siem Reap in the afternoon.

4, Beng Mealea and Koh Ker adventure trip.

5, Day trip to the floating villages on the Tonle Sap.

6, Angkor Wat in the morning. Angkor Thom in the afternoon.

7, Cambodian cooking class in the morning. Free afternoon to relax before departure.

Don't forget to save some time to relax or for activities like spa treatments and quad biking!



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Exploring the Central Temples of Angkor

Dawn at Angkor Wat

(Half Day)

Rising at the crack of dawn, we journey out to the Mother of all temples, **Angkor Wat**. Believed to be the world's largest religious building, this temple is the perfect fusion of symbolism and symmetry and a source of pride and strength to all Khmers. Built in the 12th century by King Suryavarman II, this is most famous temple at Angkor. We stay at Angkor Wat to enjoy a picnic breakfast. As the crowds return to their hotels, we venture into Angkor Wat to enjoy its magnificence in peace and quiet. We begin by unravelling the mysteries of the bas-reliefs that tell of tales from Hindu mythology and of the glories of the Khmer empire. Stretching for almost one kilometre, these intricate carvings are a candidate for the world's longest unbroken piece of art.

Following in the footsteps of the devout and the destructive before us, we then continue to the upper levels of the inner sanctuary. The final steps to the upper terrace of Angkor are the steepest of all, as pilgrims of old were to stoop on their pilgrimage to encounter the Gods. Finally the pinnacle, the sacred heart of Angkor Wat, a blend of spirituality and symmetry so perfect that few moments will measure up.

We end this incredible experience with a trip to the Angkor Café, where you can indulge in a fruit shake or iced coffee or browse the Artisans d'Angkor gift shop here,.

Exploring Angkor Wat

(Half Day)

For those that don't want to rise too early on their journey of discovery through Cambodia, we offer a later morning visit to the ultimate expression of Khmer genius after a leisurely breakfast at the hotel. We travel to Angkor Wat some time after 7am when the sunrise crowds are travelling back to town and enjoy the temple while its corridors are silent and empty.

Phnom Bakheng Sunset

(Sunrise or Sunset)



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Our journey to the mountain temple of **Phnom Bakheng** to see the sunset cast its soft light over Angkor Wat. A winding path cuts through the jungle or there is the option of an elephant ride to the summit. This temple is the signature spot for sunset, so it can get very crowded. Please advise the guide if you want to experience sunset at a quieter location or would prefer to venture here for sunrise when the crowds are generally much lighter.

Exploring Angkor Thom

(Half Day)

We visit the immense walled city of **Angkor Thom** that was the masterpiece of King Jayavarman VII. Following the occupation of Angkor by the Chams from 1177 to 1181, the new king decided to build an impregnable fortress at the heart of his empire. The scale is simply staggering and we are immediately overwhelmed by the audacity of Jayavarman on arrival at the city's gates. The causeway is lined by an intricate bridge depicting the Churning of the Ocean of Milk from Hindu mythology in which the devas (gods) and asuras (devils) play tug of war with a naga (seven-headed serpent) to obtain the elixir of immortality.

We begin our visit at the **Terrace of the Leper King**. This intricately carved platform was the royal crematorium and the statue that was originally thought to be the leper king is now believed to be Yama, the god of death. We continue along the **Terrace of Elephants**, originally used as a viewing gallery for the king to preside over parades, performances and traditional sports. At the southern end lies the **Baphuon**, once of the most beautiful temples at Angkor, dating from the reign of Udayavarman in the 11th century. It has undergone a massive renovation by the French and is now once again open for viewing.

Our climax is the enigmatic and enchanting temple of the **Bayon**. At the exact centre of Angkor Thom, this is an eccentric expression of the creative genius and inflated ego of Cambodia's most celebrated king. Its 54 towers are each topped off with the four faces of Avalokiteshvara (Buddha of Compassion), which bear more than a passing resemblance to the king himself. These colossal heads stare down from every side, exuding power and control with a hint of compassion, just the mix required to keep a hold on such a vast empire. Before clambering upwards, we unravel the mysteries of the bas-reliefs, with their intricate scenes of ancient battles against the Chams and their snapshot of daily life during the Angkor period.



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Exploring Angkor Thom on foot

(Full Day, about 8 km)

This walk is a fantastic way to experience the best of Angkor Thom and offers a real insight into the size and scale of this ancient city. We begin our walk at the impressive **South Gate** of the walled city of Angkor Thom. We walk on the immense ancient walls towards the south-west corner where there is a small temple, **Prasat Chrung**. We continue walking around to the **West Gate**, where the causeway has collapsed leaving a muddle of stone bodies looking victims of some terrible historic accident.

From the West Gate we weave our way towards the principal temples, exploring the **Baphuon**, often nicknamed the world's largest jigsaw puzzle, as it was dismantled before the civil war and the Khmer Rouge destroyed all the archaeological records; the **Royal Palace** complex, which was once home to the God-kings of Angkor; **Phimean Akas**, a petite pyramid temple; before finally arriving at atmospheric **Preah Palilay**, a Buddhist temple overshadowed by huge kapok trees. We then take a long break for lunch within the walls of Angkor Thom, enjoying some Cambodian food and perhaps a fresh coconut to boost our energy for the afternoon.

After lunch, we explore the central square of Angkor Thom, starting at the **Terrace of the Leper King**. We continue along the **Terrace of Elephants**, originally used as a viewing gallery for the king to preside over parades, performances and traditional sports. We may cross over the royal parade ground to take a look at the towers of **Prasat Suor Prat**, originally believed to have been connected by rope bridges and used for performances.

Our climax is the enigmatic and enchanting temple of the **Bayon**. At the exact centre of Angkor Thom, this is an eccentric expression of the creative genius and inflated ego of Cambodia's most celebrated king. These colossal heads stare down from every side, exuding power and control with a hint of compassion, just the mix required to keep a hold on such a vast empire.

Ta Prohm and the Small Circuit Temples

(Half Day)

We rise early to travel to **Ta Prohm** in the dawn light. Ta Prohm has been abandoned to the elements, a reminder that while empires rise and fall, the riotous power of nature marches on, oblivious to the dramas of human



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history. Left as it was 'discovered' by French explorer Henri Mouhot in 1860, the tentacle-like tree roots here are slowly strangling the stones, man first conquering nature to create, nature later conquering man to destroy.

After soaking up the unique atmosphere of Ta Prohm, we continue to the giant pyramid of **Takeo**, one of the highest temples in the Angkor area. Built at the end of the 10th century, it was never completed. Some scholars contend this was due to an inauspicious lightning strike during construction. Others have suggested the high quality sandstone was simply too hard to carve in detail.

This morning we also visit the remains of an old Angkorian bridge which once spanned the Siem Reap river. There is also the option to visit the temples of **Chau Say Tevoda** and **Thommanon** for temple enthusiasts.

Preah Khan, Neak Poan and Pre Rup ½ day afternoon

(Half Day)

We travel to the mighty temple of **Preah Khan** or 'Sacred Sword', built by King Jayavarman VII in the late 12th century. Sister temple to Ta Prohm, the cruciform corridors here are impressive and there are some wonderful carvings adorning the walls, including the spectacular hall of dancers. Look out for the curious two-storey structure that is almost Grecian in inspiration. This is one of the few temples originally dedicated to Buddhism and Hinduism. The original eastern entrance was for Mahayana Buddhists, while the other cardinal points represented the Hindu trinity of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma.

We then continue on to the elegant curves of **Neak Poan**. This petite temple is the ultimate ornamental fountain, its series of elaborate spouts including the heads of lions and elephants. Originally Neak Poan was on an island at the centre of vast baray (reservoir), known as Jayatataka or reservoir of Jaya.

We finish by experiencing sunset over the rice fields from the royal crematorium of **Pre Rup**, a classic view of the Cambodian countryside.

Banteay Srei and Banteay Samre

(Half Day)



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We head to **Banteay Srei**, Angkor's ultimate art gallery. This petite pink temple is the jewel in the crown of Angkor-era sculpture. The elaborate carvings here are the finest found in Cambodia and the name translates as 'Fortress of the Women', thanks to the intricate detail here, considered too fine for the hands of a man.

Originally believed to date from the latter part of the Angkor period, inscriptions at the site suggest it was built by a Brahman in 967. However, some architectural historians have suggested that the inscriptions may date from an earlier structure on this site and the temple is in fact later, marking a high-water mark in Khmer sculpture.

Later we visit the 12th century temple of **Banteay Samre**. Built by King Suryavarman II, the genius behind Angkor Wat, this temple has been extensively restored. The temple is unique in that over-quarrying of sandstone led to the use of laterite for the roofed corridors. The pediments above the inner doors here include some of the most accomplished carving from the Angkor period.

The Old Temples of Roluos

(Half Day)

We travel back in time to one of the earliest capitals in the Angkor area, Hariharalaya, now known as Roluos. We begin with a visit to the brick temple of **Lolei**, originally set on an island in the centre of the **Indratataka** baray (reservoir). This temple has some well preserved sandstone carvings and the vast stone doors are carved from a single piece of stone.

We continue to **Preah Ko** (sacred cow), named in honour of Shiva's mount, Nandin. This temple owes more to the pre-Angkorian brick sanctuaries of Cambodia's earlier Chenla empire than the sandstone behemoths that came later. Originally coated in stucco and painted, there is still some of the ancient plaster visible on the rear towers.

Finally, we encounter **Bakong**, the earliest of the temple mountains, which later became the signature of Khmer kings. It is a giant pyramid, its cardinal points marked by giant elephants. We climb to the summit for views over the surrounding countryside.

The Temples of the Small Circuit

(Half Day)



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We travel to the large stone temple of **Eastern Mebon**, originally located on an island in the centre of the now dry Eastern Baray (reservoir). A low pyramid, this temple has large guardian elephants on each corner. This is one of the few temples where we can understand the construction techniques of the ancient Khmers, as there are still large soil ramps on each side of the temple, showing us how they moved these heavy stones into place.

We visit the royal bathing pond of **Sra Srang**. No bath will ever be quite the same again when you have set eyes on this vast pool, once for the exclusive use of the king and his concubines. Originally lined with sandstone steps, we climb up on to the western terrace and meet friendly local children jumping in the water.

We walk to the first great Buddhist monastery in Cambodia, **Banteay Kdei**, built in 1186 by Jayavarman VII who was a Mahayana Buddhist. We explore its extensive corridors and elegant sculptures. Although it is in a ruinous state, it often receives far fewer visitors than nearby Ta Prohm, giving it a serene atmosphere.

We then return to Siem Reap via the temple of **Kravan**. Built entirely from brick and dating from 921, this temple was extensively restored in the 1960s. Inside the small towers are some of the best brick carving found anywhere in the Khmer empire, including a giant Vishnu.

Forgotten Temples of Jayavarman VII

(Half Day)

Renowned for iconic temples such as the Bayon, Ta Prohm and Banteay Chhmar, the King of Kings, Jayavarman VII also built a vast array of smaller, almost boutique shrines. We leave behind the main circuit and visit a quartet of temples that will take you away from the crowds and back in time to the glory days of Angkor. We begin at **Krol Ko** which, like all four of the temples we will visit, offers intricate pediment carvings, female devatas carved into niches and a central sanctuary made of sandstone. The twin shrines of **Prasat Prei** and **Banteay Prei** follow before we head off further north to the larger temple complex of **Banteay Thom**, saving the best until last. Banteay Thom was re-discovered in the mid-1990s and is a perfect example of how temples outside the main Angkor Park have suffered from theft and vandalism through the centuries. With its Buddha carvings defaced in the 14th century, more recent temple robberies are much in evidence though there is still a lot to see and enjoy at this remote and rarely-visited site.



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Western Baray

(Half Day)

We travel to the **Western Baray**, the largest reservoir constructed during the Khmer Empire. Stretching an incredible 8km in length and 2km in width, this was a key element of the advanced hydraulic system that ensured the ancient Khmers mastered the seasonal cycle of water.

We travel by boat to a small island at the centre of the baray where we visit the ruin of **Western Mebon** temple from the 11th century. This was the location where the giant reclining bronze Vishnu in the National Museum in Phnom Penh was found.

We return to Siem Reap to visit the **Artisans D'Angkor** workshop. Set up to revitalize the handicraft industry of Siem Reap, artisans are chosen from poor, disadvantaged, rural communities. Stone carving, wood carving, silverwork, silk weaving, lacquerware, we tour the workshops seeing the artisans at work and then take the opportunity to visit their famous gallery.



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Exploring More Remote Temples

Kbal Spean

(Half Day)

We journey north to **Kbal Spean**. The original '**River of a Thousand Lingas**', Kbal Spean is an intricately carved riverbed deep in the foothills of the Cambodian jungle. The river flows down to the Tonlé Sap lake, and in ancient times its holy waters breathed life into the rice fields of the empire via the most complex irrigation system the world had ever seen. The Khmers venerated its limestone bed with a riot of carvings, including the delicate deities Vishnu and Shiva with their consorts. Lingams are phallic representations sacred to Hindus as fertility symbols and hundreds, perhaps thousands, are carved into the bedrock here. The carvings were only rediscovered in 1969 when French researcher Jean Boulbet was shown the river by a local hermit.

A trip to Kbal Spean is one of the easiest ways to experience a short jungle trek in the Angkor area, as it is a steady but scenic climb to reach the river carvings. The path winds its way through knotted vines and big boulder formations and occasionally offers big views over the surrounding jungle. And there is a small waterfall below the carved riverbed, perfect for cooling off after the hot climb.

The Lost Temple of Beng Mealea

(Half Day)

We travel to the lost temple of **Beng Mealea**, the titanic of temples, a slumbering giant lost for centuries in the forests of Cambodia. It is the most accessible of Angkor's lost temples, a mirror image of Angkor Wat, but utterly consumed by the voracious appetite of nature. Constructed by Suryavarman II (1113-1150), the builder of Angkor Wat, the forest has run riot here and it is hard to get a sense of the monument's shape amid the daunting ruins.

Here it is possible to enjoy an Indiana Jones experience clambering about the vast ruin. For those who want a more gentle adventure, there is also a sturdy wooden walkway running right into the heart of the temple.



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It is also possible to visit a nearby Angkor-era quarry from where stone was cut to build these massive monuments.

Beng Mealea and the Villages of the Tonle Sap

(Full Day)

This morning, we travel to the lost temple of **Beng Mealea**, the titanic of temples, a slumbering giant lost for centuries in the forests of Cambodia. It is the most accessible of Angkor's lost temples, a mirror image of Angkor Wat, but utterly consumed by the voracious appetite of nature. Constructed by Suryavarman II (1113-1150), the builder of Angkor Wat, the forest has run riot here and it is hard to get a sense of the monument's shape amid the daunting ruins.

Here it is possible to enjoy an Indiana Jones experience clambering about the vast ruin. For those who want a more gentle adventure, there is also a sturdy wooden walkway running right into the heart of the temple. It is also possible to visit a nearby Angkor-era quarry from where stone was cut to build these massive monuments.

We then continue south to one of the largest and least-visited villages on the Tonle Sap Lake, Kompong Khleang, which has a population of about 10,000 people, all of whom make a living from the fishing industry. We explore the canals (wet season) or streets (dry season) of this incredible town. In the wet season, the houses appear to be floating, as water laps at the verandas, but in the dry season towering stilts are revealed, the houses almost like wooden skyscrapers. We visit one of the pagodas here, built on the site of an ancient temple, and see the wall paintings.

We travel by boat on the great lake to **Kompong Pluk**. Cruising down a narrow waterway, we enter this medieval floating village, where the houses stand atop stilts as much as seven metres above the water. Everything lives on the water, pigs, dogs, crocodiles and people, all jockeying for space in this incredible floating community. We explore the amazing flooded forest here before continuing across the Great Lake to the floating village of Chong Kneas. We reach dry land and return to Siem Reap by road.



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Adventures around Koh Ker and Beng Mealea

(Full Day)

We travel to the lost temple of **Beng Mealea**, the titanic of temples, a slumbering giant lost for centuries in the forests of Cambodia. It is the most accessible of Angkor's lost temples, a mirror image of Angkor Wat, but utterly consumed by the voracious appetite of nature. Constructed by Suryavarman II (1113-1150), the builder of Angkor Wat, the forest has run riot here and it is hard to get a sense of the monument's shape amid the daunting ruins.

Here it is possible to enjoy an Indiana Jones experience clambering about the vast ruin. For those who want a more gentle adventure, there is also a sturdy wooden walkway running right into the heart of the temple. It is also possible to visit a nearby Angkor-era quarry from where stone was cut to build these massive monuments.

We then head into the bush to the remote Angkor capital of **Koh Ker**. The history of Cambodia is riven with dynastic spats and political intrigue and one of the most memorable came in the 10th century when Jayavarman IV (928-942) fell out with his family, stormed off to the northwest and established the rival capital of Koh Ker. Although the capital for just 15 years, Jayavarman IV was determined to legitimise his rule through a prolific building programme that left a legacy of 30 major temples and some gargantuan sculpture that is on display in the National Museum in Phnom Penh.

We climb to the summit of **Prasat Thom**, a seven-storey step pyramid, more Mayan than Khmer, with commanding views over the surrounding forest. Nearby is **Prasat Krahom** or Red Temple, named after the pinkish Banteay Srei-style stone from which it is built.

There are many more temples in the area, including the five towers of **Prasat Ling**, each enclosing a giant linga or fertility symbol, the biggest and best found in situ anywhere in Cambodia.



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Sightseeing Beyond the Temples

Floating Village of Chong Kneas

(Half Day)

Taking a break from the temples, we travel out to the mighty Tonle Sap Lake to visit the **floating village** of Chong Kneas. Nestled under the hill of Phnom Krom, this floating community moves location with the waters of the lake. During the wet season when the lake swells to five times its size, the village is near Phnom Krom, but during the dry season, it moves as much as 4km from the hill.

Everything floats on water in this living fishing community. There are floating schools, floating shops, floating petrol stations, even floating karaoke bars. Many of the houses are floating fish farms with large pens of fish underneath. For those that are interested, we can also make a stop at the Gecko Environment Centre to learn more about the lake, which is like the heartbeat of Cambodia, providing sustenance to millions of Khmers.

Exploring the Temples of Roluos and Kompong Pluk

(Full Day)

We depart Siem Reap by remorque moto, a charming carriage hitched onto the back of a motorbike, the famous local transport of Siem Reap. For the more adventurous we offer the option of a Trek mountain bike.

We follow small back roads through rural landscapes and picturesque villages. Our first stop is the temple of **Bakong** in the Roluos group, the first of the great pyramid mountains which later kings were to copy. From Bakong, we continue into Roluos town to visit a very local market, untouched by tourism. After some refreshments here, we follow the course of the Roluos river to the nearest navigable point where we board small wooden boats for the trip to **Kompong Pluk**.

Cruising down a narrow waterway, we enter this medieval floating village, where the houses stand atop stilts as much as seven metres above the water. Everything lives on the water, pigs, dogs, crocodiles and people, all jockeying for space in this incredible floating town. We explore the local wat here, before boarding a bigger boat to take us through the flooded forest and across the Great Lake to Chong Kneas and the holy mountain of



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Phnom Krom. We climb Phnom Krom for a glorious sunset over the Tonle Sap before heading back to Siem Reap by road.

Kompong Khleang and the Tonle Sap

(Half Day)

We travel southeast to one of the largest and least-visited villages on the Tonle Sap Lake, Kompong Khleang, about 55km from Siem Reap. It has a population of about 10,000 people, all of whom make a living from the fishing industry. We explore the canals (wet season) or streets (dry season) of this incredible town. In the wet season, the houses appear to be floating, as water laps at the verandas, but in the dry season towering stilts are revealed, the houses almost like wooden skyscrapers.

We visit one of the pagodas here, built on the site of an ancient temple, and see the wall paintings. We may also stop off to visit a house in the village to learn a little more about local life. We cruise into the open water of the great lake to see a small floating village and learn some more about this incredible natural floodbarrier. Later we return to Siem Reap by road.

Angkor National Museum

(Two Hours)

This new flagship museum on the road to Angkor is a showcase for the sculpture and culture of the Khmer civilisation. An ultra-modern art space, this museum uses the latest technology to bring this ancient empire to life. The collection is themed by period, religion and royalty and includes the impressive Gallery of 1000 Buddhas, inspired by Preah Poan at Angkor Wat. There is plenty of information on hand throughout the tour and lots of interactive displays, such as the sunrise over Angkor Wat, although we'd recommend the real sunrise as a more memorable experience. The main drawbacks are a rather limited collection compared with the National Museum in Phnom Penh, although this is slowly being addressed, plus a rather high entry fee compared to other museums in the region. There is an attached Cultural Mall with cafes, shops and art galleries.

Angkor Conservation

(Two Hours)



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This Ministry of Culture compound has long been home to some of the hidden treasures of the Khmer empire. A storage depot to protect statues and carvings during the long periods of war and instability in the second half of the 20th century, many of the best known statuary around Angkor was moved here for safe-keeping in the early 1970s. Some of it has been loaned to the new National Museum, but much of it is still here in large warehouses or strewn throughout the leafy grounds. This is an interesting place to explore for those with a keen interest in Khmer sculpture.

Cambodian Cultural Village

(Two Hours)

This is by no means a 'must' for visitors to Siem Reap, but for families travelling with children, it can be a lot of fun and a much-needed diversion from the temples. It aims to represent all of Cambodia in a whirlwind tour of recreated houses and villages. The visit begins with a wax museum and includes homes of the Cham, Chinese, Kreung and Khmer people, as well as miniature replicas of landmark buildings in Cambodia. There are dance shows and performances throughout the day. Even for those without children, it could make an interesting diversion, as it is a genuine Cambodian tourist attraction and most of the visitors are Khmers on a big day out rather than the foreign tourists seen around Angkor.

Pagodas and Handicrafts in Siem Reap

(Half Day)

We visit the 19th century temple of **Wat Bo**, one of the most important pagodas in Siem Reap. Dating from the 19th century, the interior of the main temple includes some of the finest religious murals in Cambodia, depicting the life of the Buddha. We continue to the Chantiers Ecole workshop of **Artisans d'Angkor**, a handicrafts cooperative helping to revive the artisan skills of the Angkor era. We learn about different techniques, including lacquerware, stone carving and silk painting and visit the impressive showroom.

We then travel to **Wat Athvea** to visit an interesting fusion temple which includes the impressive remains of an 12th century sandstone structure and an attractive old pagoda. The original Angkor-era temple was used



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as a training site for construction workers and is one of the only temples facing west. It is possible to arrange a blessing ceremony for the success of your trip in Cambodia.

Exploring the Pagodas of Siem Reap

(Half Day)

We spend today visiting the historic pagodas of Siem Reap, a peaceful and charming alternative to the temples of Angkor. We begin with a visit to the modern pagoda of **Wat Thmei** where there is a moving memorial stupa to the victims of the Khmer Rouge.

We continue to **Wat Preah Inkosei** which is built on the site of a 10th century temple. Two brick towers remain and one includes a superb lintel depicting the **Churning of the Ocean of Milk**. We may also meet some English-speaking monks to learn more about Buddhist rituals. There is also a small shadow puppetry workshop here, showcasing some of the most popular characters from the Ramayana.

We continue to the 19th century temple of **Wat Bo**, one of the most important pagodas in Siem Reap. Dating from the 19th century, the interior of the main temple includes some of the finest religious murals in Cambodia, depicting the life of the Buddha.

We visit the old royal palace compound of **Wat Dam Nak**, which has been converted to a place of learning for the Centre for Khmer Studies. There are some elegant old buildings here and extensive gardens.

We then travel to **Wat Athvea** to visit an interesting fusion temple which includes the impressive remains of an 12th century sandstone structure and an attractive old pagoda. The original Angkor-era temple was used as a training site for construction workers and is one of the only temples facing west. It is possible to arrange a blessing ceremony for the success of your trip in Cambodia.

Banteay Srei Lifestyle

(Full Day)

This morning we travel towards Banteay Srei village to learn the art of Cambodian cuisine with a **cooking class** at the Angkor Palm country house. This is a traditional wooden house set in a pretty village. Choose from a selection of favourites, including meat, fish and vegetarian options and discover a cuisine laced with subtle



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spices and tempting aromas. Once we finish the class, we enjoy the fruits of our labour, eating our very own creations. Take these recipes home and impress your friends with a Cambodian evening, a great excuse to show them your holiday snaps.

After lunch, we continue to the **Cambodia Landmine Museum** to learn more about these enemies within. This museum has eye-opening displays on the curse of land mines in Cambodia. The collection includes a mock minefield so that visitors can attempt to locate the deactivated mines.

Later we continue to **Banteay Srei**, Angkor's ultimate art gallery. This petite pink temple is the jewel in the crown of Angkor-era sculpture. The elaborate carvings here are the finest found in Cambodia and the name translates as 'Fortress of the Women', thanks to the intricate detail here, considered too fine for the hands of a man.

On our way back to Siem Reap, we may stop to visit a local family house and learn about the importance of the Sugar Palm in rural communities. We get the chance to see how they harvest the fruits and turn them into sugar or a sweet delicacy.

For those who are interested, there is the option of a sunset at Pre Rup temple to complete the day, offering beautiful views across the ricefields.

Prek Toal Excursion

(Full Day)

Today we travel to the pristine biosphere of **Prek Toal**, home to some of the most endangered birdlife on the planet. The immense Tonle Sap Lake is one of the most productive bodies of water in the world and millions of fish spawn here in the flooded forest. Prek Toal lies on the northeastern shore of the Tonle Sap, about one hour by boat from the port at Phnom Krom.

Prek Toal is a vast area of natural flooded forest that draws thousands of birds annually to breed during the dry season. This is one of the premier places in Southeast Asia to see rare birds such as storks, adjutants, pelicans and ibis. Birdwatchers will drift through their habitat and can observe large flocks of birds feeding on the lake shore, perched in the trees or soaring above the forest.



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A trip to Prek Toal requires an early start at 5.30am. We transfer by boat from Phnom Krom to Prek Toal and enjoy breakfast along the way. The morning is spent birdwatching on a traditional wooden boat as we glide through the flooded forest with local specialists. After a local lunch, we experience local life in the floating village, learning about different fishing techniques and traditional water hyacinth weaving. We return to Siem Reap late afternoon.

Birding at Ang Trapeang Thmor

(Full Day)

We leave Siem Reap after breakfast and travel west into Banteay Meanchey province. We pass through **Kralanh** district before veering north towards Phnom Srok. We eventually come to **Ang Trapeang Thmor Sarus Crane Reserve**, a giant reservoir constructed during Khmer Rouge rule which now provides a habitat for more than 200 species of bird. During the dry season, this reserve provides a habitat for more than 300 rare Sarus Crane, one of the tallest birds in the world with a distinctive crimson head. We enjoy a picnic lunch at the site before enjoying some more birdwatching in the early afternoon. We return to Siem Reap by road.



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Activities Beyond the Temples

Classical Dance Show in Siem Reap

(Evening)

This evening we enjoy a **classical dance performance**. We will see many of the most popular Cambodian dances, including the graceful Apsara dance, scenes from the Ramayana (known as Reamker in Cambodia), the coconut dance and more. The classical dances include elaborate costume and date back to the time of Angkor, while the folk dances are connected to the harvest and the cycle of the seasons.

Cambodian Cooking Class

(Half Day)

We offer a range of cooking classes in Siem Reap, including 'Cooks in Tuk Tuks', Le Tigre de Papier, Sugar Palm and the Angkor Palm country house in Banteay Srei. We spend some time learning the secrets of the Cambodian kitchen, a cuisine laced with subtle spices and tempting aromas. Choose from a selection of favourites, including meat, fish and vegetarian options. Once we finish the class, we enjoy the fruits of our labour, eating our very own creations. Take these recipes home and impress your friends with a Cambodian evening.

Golf at the Phokeethra Course

(Half Day)

Everyone is talking about the brand new world class golf course at the **Phokeethra Country Club**, so make sure you enjoy a round at this par-72, 18-hole course that includes the par-5 18th hole, at a challenging 582 yards. The course stages the Cambodian Open tournament every year and proudly boasts, "Tee-off in the 11th century and finish your round back in the 21st century". The Phokeethra clubhouse affords vistas overlooking the entire landscape of the course and within the grounds, the magnificent 'Roluh' bridge, dates back to the time of the Khmer Empire. Located less than 20km from Siem Reap, the picturesque course stretches 7,145 yards. It has



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sweeping, tree-lined fairways and generous greens, though the natural lakes and water hazards, fast greens, and tricky bunkers will challenge golfers of all abilities.

Golf at 'The Faldo Course'

(Half Day)

For the golfing enthusiast, the brand new 'Faldo Course' at the **Angkor Golf Resort**, is a definite starting place to tee-off your round in Cambodia. The country's first PGA standard championship golf course, its 7,230-yards, it offers a tough test on a course designed by Europe's greatest golfer and winner of 6 Majors in his illustrious career, Nick Faldo. The course features generous fairways, a bold bunkering style, and greens with plenty of subtle undulations that not only encourage but reward a variety of approach shots. It's within easy reach of the city centre, so why not sign-up for a round of golf in the shadow one of the world's greatest monuments on a course designed by one of the world's greatest players.

Horse Riding around the Temples

(Various)

For those that enjoy a spot of riding, we offer the chance to explore the countryside around Siem Reap on horseback. These gentle rides include some secluded temple spots and the chance to enjoy local life at a slower pace. Riding lessons are also available for children or beginners.

Quad Biking

(Various)

For those that have never experienced it, all-terrain biking is a lot of fun and all trips include a short introductory lesson to bring riders up to speed. Rides around Siem Reap include a sunset option through the ricefields, some quiet pagodas and temples and a series of backroads through the pretty countryside around Siem Reap.



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Cycling Angkor

Baray and Angkor Thom (Half Day Ride)

After an early departure from Siem Reap, it takes about 30 mins to reach the junction of Highway 6 and the Western Baray road. After only a few hundred metres an Organic Farm can be visited. This farm delivers vegetables to responsible hotels in Siem Reap town. A pleasant ride along the river ends at the pier of the Western Baray where many Khmer people enjoy leisure time with their families and friends during the weekends and holidays. From here a short ride east over a bit bumpier roads passes Wat Suai Anthiat. Opposite the pagoda an island can be seen, which houses the Western Mebon temple. At the pagoda, local snacks and drinks are available.

From the pagoda, the ride continues over bumpier roads without shade towards Angkor Thom. The views of the Angkor area are magnificent and Phnom Bakheng can be seen rising from the flat countryside surrounding the Baray. Once the remote West Gate of Angkor Thom is reached, the roads become shadier. The West Gate is a remarkable entrance to the ancient city of Angkor Thom. Following this route, we eventually end up at the Bayon in the centre of Angkor Thom. Following the road counterclockwise around the Bayon, a right turn on the east side of the Bayon brings us to the remote East Gate of the city, used in the filming of Tomb Raider. From here small jungle trails lead northwards towards the Victory Gate, which will be the end of this morning ride, unless you plan to explore the temples of the small circuit in more depth.



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Wat Athvea and Wat Chedei (Half Day Ride)

Departure from hotel after breakfast by vehicle to Wat Chedei. A long and straight line of trees leads towards Wat Chedei, a small modern style pagoda. Older artifacts are also visible with an old stupa and a roofless pagoda with old and original paintings as its highlight. After this visit, the bicycles are prepared and we start the ride towards Wat Athvea.

We follow a small river is followed all the way down to Wat Athvea. The route leads through small rural villages and appealing paddy fields. Through the back entrance we arrive at Wat Athvea where a snack and drink are served to cool down. Although small in size, the temple is located on beautiful grounds and the pagoda is next to the walls of the ancient temple. It is possible to end the ride here and return to the hotel by vehicle or continue to cycle through the centre of Siem Reap, stopping at a local market or for a drink in a café, before returning to your hotel.

Highlights of Angkor (Full day)

In the morning, we are collected by our guide and vehicle and transferred to the entrance of the Angkor Park. Once away from the hustle and bustle of the main city roads we then cycle to Angkor Wat. Believed to be the world's largest religious building, this is the most famous temple at Angkor.

Then, we continue to Angkor Thom the majestic walled city of the ancient kingdom. We take time to visit the magical Bayon temple and the Elephant and Leper King Terraces. We take a break for our picnic lunch and then continue to the Gate of the Dead (east gate). Here we leave the ground trail and cycle our bikes across



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the top of the fortified walls to the Victory gate. Then passing the pyramid temple of Takeo we take the road to Ta Prohm. Ta Prohm has been abandoned to the elements, a reminder that while empires rise and fall, the riotous power of nature marches on, oblivious to the dramas of human history. Left as it was 'discovered' by French explorer Henri Mouhout in 1860, the tentacle-like tree roots here are slowly strangling the surviving stones.

The last leg of our adventure takes us past the world's largest ever swimming pool of Sra Srang where the most famous of Angkorian kings, Jayavarman VII, was known to take an occasional dip. Then we cycle through the plains and rice fields where (depending on the time of year) we may see people working in the fields and finally we arrive at Pre Rup which may have been used as a crematorium. At this pyramid temple we can celebrate our accomplishments with a cold drink as we admire the sunset over the Cambodian countryside. We then transfer by vehicle back to town.

Roluos and Kompong Pluk (Full day ride)

After breakfast, we depart by vehicle to the drop off point near the bus station. From there, we ride past small rural villages towards Bakong temple. In the wet season, this ride provides magnificent views of endless paddy fields. The morning is the most beautiful time of the day to cycle here.

Upon arrival at Bakong, the temple can be explored. The next temple, Prasat Preah Ko, is situated only a mere 300m away. After crossing Highway 6, Lolei can also be visited. These temples are called the Rolous Group and were built in the 9th century when the first capital, Hariharalaya, was located here. From the main entrance of Bakong the road continues to Psar Bakong, a very traditional country town market. A right turn onto a paved road will lead towards the most beautiful floating village on the Tonle Sap Lake, Kampong Pluk.



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At the harbour, a local boat is prepared and provides a wonderful tour through the floating village. Kampong Pluk is still quite unexplored and has an atmospheric submerged forest to explore. Lunch can be enjoyed in one of the floating houses in the form of a picnic.

After this visit, the vehicle transfers back towards Siem Reap where a rewarding shower and cool drink awaits.

Chau Srei Vibol, Phnom Bok and Banteay Samre (Full Day Ride)

After breakfast, we depart by vehicle for the village of Preah Dak beyond Angkor. Famous for sugar palm and basketry, this pretty village is an interesting place to learn more about local life. We continue our ride to Banteay Samre, constructed King Suryavarman II in the mid 12th century. People refer to this temple as a miniature Angkor Wat due to its completeness and similarities to the mother of all temples. From Banteay Samre, we follow a paved road to Phnom Bok. On the way, several war remnants can be seen in the paddy fields. Upon arrival at Phnom Bok, we climb the 600 steps for immense views over the surrounding area. In the distance, the Kulen hills are also visible on a clear day. On top of Phnom Bok an ancient ruin overlooks the plains below. Drinks and a picnic lunch are served to cool off.

A short cycle from Phnom Bok, in between the paddy fields with the Kulen Hills as a marvellous backdrop, we continue towards Chau Srei Vibol, an interesting temple complex that sees very few tourists. The route leading to this temple passes by some of the most beautiful villages and scenic vistas of endless paddy fields. Climb the small hill to visit Chau Srei Vibol and on a clear day Angkor Wat can be seen from the hill. The classic wooden pagoda at the entrance of the complex is home to many young monks who are shy but eager to practice their English language skills. For those who are enjoying the village scenery, it is possible to continue to back towards Angkor on a country road or the ride ends here with a vehicle transfer back to Siem Reap.



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Temple Safari Adventures

Koh Ker Temple Safari

(2 days/1 night)

Day 1: Siem Reap to Koh Ker

We travel to the lost temple of **Beng Mealea**, the titanic of temples, a slumbering giant lost for centuries in the forests of Cambodia. It is the most accessible of Angkor's lost temples, a mirror image of Angkor Wat, but utterly consumed by the voracious appetite of nature. The forest has run riot here and it is hard to get a sense of the monument's shape amid the daunting ruins. Here it is possible to enjoy an Indiana Jones experience clambering about the vast ruin.

We then head into the bush to the remote Angkor capital of **Koh Ker**. The history of Cambodia is riven with dynastic spats and political intrigue and one of the most memorable came in the 10th century when Jayavarman IV (928-942) fell out with his family, stormed off to the northwest and established the rival capital of Koh Ker. Although the capital for just 15 years, Jayavarman IV was determined to legitimise his rule through a prolific building programme that left a legacy of 30 major temples.

We climb to the summit of **Prasat Thom**, a seven-storey step pyramid, more Mayan than Khmer, with commanding views over the surrounding forest. Nearby is **Prasat Krahom** or Red Temple, named after the pinkish stone from which it is built. We then return to our camp for the night, spending the night in a luxury safari tent.

Day 2: Koh Ker to Siem Reap

We rise early to enjoy a sunrise from the summit of the immense pyramid of **Prasat Thom**. After breakfast, we explore some of the lesser known sites around Koh Ker. There are many more temples in the area, including the five towers of **Prasat Ling**, each enclosing a giant linga or fertility symbol, the biggest and best found in situ anywhere in Cambodia. We then continue back to Siem Reap for some rest and relaxation.



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Banteay Chhmar Temple Safari

(2 days/1 night)

Day 1: Siem Reap to Banteay Chhmar

Today, we travel northwest from Siem Reap to the incredible jungle temple of **Banteay Chhmar**, famous for its signature faces of Jayavarman VII. We travel to Svay Sisophon, which is an optional base for the night for those that prefer the comfort of a hotel. We then continue to the main temple of Banteay Chhmar for a thorough exploration. We see the magnificent carvings of Lokesvara with 32 arms, nicknamed lok sam-pee (Mr 32) by Khmers, as well as the beautiful Hall of Dancers, similar to the famous Preah Khan. After clambering about among this sleeping giant, we continue to explore the outer complex, including the outer gate of **Ta Prohm**, like a smaller cousin of the impressive Angkor Thom gates and protected by a moat. We spend the night in our luxury tent close to the temple of Banteay Chhmar.

Day 2: Banteay Chhmar to Siem Reap

After enjoying an optional sunrise at beautiful Banteay Chhmar, we leave some free time to explore some of the more remote outer gates and temples around the main complex. We continue south to the enigmatic temple of **Banteay Top**. Here the central tower has collapsed, only to be rebuilt and resembles a precarious tower of building blocks. The interior includes original wooden supports, a rarity in this tropical climate. We then journey south to the provincial capital of Svay Sisophon where we have a local lunch. There may be time to take a look at the bustling market, which is crammed with goods from nearby Thailand. We then continue west to Siem Reap, where we enjoy some time to wind down in our hotel after our long road trip.

Banteay Chhmar, Preah Vihear, Koh Ker Temple Safari

(4 days/3 nights)

Day 1: Siem Reap to Banteay Chhmar



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Today, we travel northwest from Siem Reap to the incredible jungle temple of Banteay Chhmar, famous for its signature faces of Jayavarman VII. We travel to Svay Sisophon, which is an optional base for the night for those that prefer the comfort of a hotel. We then continue to the main temple of Banteay Chhmar for a thorough exploration. lok sam-pee (Mr 32) by Khmers, as well as the beautiful Hall of Dancers, similar to the famous Preah Khan. After clambering about among this sleeping giant, we continue to explore the outer complex, including the outer gate of Ta Prohm, like a smaller cousin of the impressive Angkor Thom gates and protected by a moat. We spend the night in our luxury tent close to the temple of Banteay Chhmar.

Day 2: Banteay Chhmar to Preah Vihear

After enjoying an optional sunrise at beautiful Banteay Chhmar, we continue to journey into remotest Cambodia towards the magnificent mountain temple of **Preah Vihear**. We break for lunch at Anlong Veng, a former Khmer Rouge stronghold until the end of the civil war in 1998. Now a boomtown, there is also the option to visit the former house of military strongman Ta Mok. We then continue east towards Preah Vihear. The snaking road up the mountain is very steep in places and we eventually emerge at the second enclosure of this king of the mountain temples.

While our team sets up camp, we explore the temple on foot. Some tourists cross over from the Thai side each day, but most have long gone and we have this incredible complex to ourselves. We continue onwards to the final level, clinging to a cliff face in the Dangrek Mountains, towering hundreds of metres above lowland Cambodia below. The views from this most mountainous of temple mountains are breathtaking, the foundation stones of the temple stretching to the edge of the cliff as it plunges precipitously away to the plains of Preah Vihear province below. We spend the night in our luxury safari tent.

Day 3: Preah Vihear to Koh Ker



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We rise early for a spectacular sunrise over the plains of lowland Cambodia. While breakfast is prepared, there is some more time to explore this magical temple without the crowds. We then leave this sacred mountain and continue our journey deeper into Preah Vihear province.

We are making for the remote Angkor capital of **Koh Ker**. The history of Cambodia is riven with dynastic spats and political intrigue and one of the most memorable came in the 10th century when Jayavarman IV (928-942) fell out with his family, stormed off to the northwest and established the rival capital of Koh Ker. Although the capital for just 15 years, Jayavarman IV was determined to legitimise his rule through a prolific building programme that left a legacy of 30 major temples and some gargantuan sculpture that is on display in the National Museum in Phnom Penh.

We return to camp for the night and enjoy a local dinner before bedding down in our luxury safari tent.

Day 4: Koh Ker to Siem Reap

We rise early to enjoy a sunrise from the summit of the immense pyramid of Prasat Thom. After breakfast, we travel to the lost temple of **Beng Mealea**, the titanic of temples, a slumbering giant lost for centuries in the forests of Cambodia. It is the most accessible of Angkor's lost temples, a mirror image of Angkor Wat, but utterly consumed by the voracious appetite of nature. Constructed by Suryavarman II (1113-1150), the builder of Angkor Wat, the forest has run riot here and it is hard to get a sense of the monument's shape amid the daunting ruins. We then continue back to Siem Reap where we check into our hotel and enjoy some rest and relaxation.